

GARRET KEIZER

The Last Man Who Knew Everything

*“the Jesuit scholar Athanasius Kircher (d. 1680),
reputed to be ‘the last man who knew everything.’”*

Some days I feel it coming,
though I do not know
the moment it will come:
the bittersweet escape
of whatever detail will inevitably
escape me—with my own escape
as a consequence.

~

Do I know the words to every song,
or why fools fall in love,
or why the most desired men
are often fools?

Do I know what Job could never know,
the “storehouse of the hail” and all the rest,
or if I’ll ever be like Job, so cursed or blessed?

~

It comforts them to think of my omniscience,
and spares them, too,
from further thinking and from giving
me another thought.

~

The Last Man Who Knew Everything
does not know where he left his spectacles;
and in whatever place he finds them
he will not know why
he did not look there first.

~

The Last Man Who Knew Everything
is a celibate bore.
The First Man Who Knew Everything
knew a woman
knew more.

~

A young girl brings us eggs and cheeses.
Dark-haired she is, with rings in her ears.
I have never spoken to her,
but I have heard her singing
to her horse. This is something
I thought you'd like to know.

~

Here is something I would like to know:
when that knuckle-headed novice
is coming with my soup.

~

The Last Man Who Knew Everything—
yet I could not tell you
the first man who said so.

~

An accolade is like a gift of magic clothes.
A myth, its effect is also mythical:
You put it on only to discover
you can't take it off,
the fit so delectable
it eats up your life.

~

When one man can know everything—
take it as a given—such are times
when few men know much.

Yet something sweet, I think,
to live in times when *know-it-all*
is not said in derision.

~

Maybe I do know, maybe I do.
It has occurred to me that maybe I do.
Is it my knowledge that's ironic,
or my self-deprecation?
The only thing
that is never ironic
is the need for salvation.

~

In the best world every man
would know everything
that was worth knowing
and would know that others knew
as well as he, and would also know
that things worth knowing are few.

~

Am I in the old world or the new?
Here's the New World on a map.
They've yet to kill a witch there,
though I happen to know they will.

~

Omniscience is like any other job,
you do it or you don't.
You're never as proficient as supposed,
or guilty as accused,
or happy as you used to think you'd be.

~

The Last Man Who Knew Everything
might take a nap. Then what will he know?
Not even that he's napping. Wake me
when the fools are wise or supper's come.